

### BACKGROUND

COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on the lives of individuals living in long-term care facilities. The pandemic has directly impacted the health of those who have contracted the virus and affected residents indirectly through restrictions to visitation that have decreased valuable time spent with family and friends.

In June, the Indiana Department of Health allowed for [outdoor visitation](#), and in July allowed for the resumption of [indoor visitation](#). Each year, many families take loved ones who live in long-term care facilities to their homes to celebrate the holidays. Unfortunately, this year the fall and winter holiday seasons are coinciding with significant increases in community spread of COVID-19. The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently [reported](#) that an important driver of the recent case increases is small family gatherings. The [CDC](#) and the Indiana Department of Health recommend that individuals at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should avoid in-person gatherings with individuals with whom they do not live.

***Because most individuals living in long-term care facilities fall into the category of increased risk, the state Department of Health strongly recommends against families taking persons who reside in long-term care facilities to their homes or to gatherings for holiday events. This recommendation does not apply to residents who in the last 90 days have been diagnosed with and recovered from COVID-19. Such individuals, however, must meet [CDC criteria](#) for discontinuing transmission-based precautions.***

Instead of visitations in your home, we recommend visiting with loved ones at the long-term care facility either through outdoor visitation or in those facilities where it is deemed [safe](#) through indoor visitation.

For those families who will have high-risk individuals who reside in long-term care facilities in their homes over the holidays, we recommend taking the following steps to lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This guidance will be updated as more information becomes available.

### PLAN AHEAD

Take proactive steps to reduce the risk that anyone in your house, or visiting your house, develops or is exposed to COVID-19.

- **Decrease exposures:** For two weeks prior to your holiday gatherings, avoid indoor settings with people you don't live with where you cannot socially distance or wear a mask (e.g., indoor social events, bars, restaurants, carpooling).
- **Wear a mask:** Wear a cloth mask at all times when you are in indoor locations outside of your house or at outdoor events where you cannot socially distance from others.
- **Wash your hands:** As recommend by the [CDC](#), regularly wash your hands or use hand sanitizer and ask those coming in your house to do the same.
- **Physically distance:** Follow [CDC guidelines](#) and socially distance at least 6 feet from others outside your household when possible.

## CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Create a safer environment for those visiting you.

- **Screen:** Ask anyone entering or staying in your house if they have had [symptoms](#) (e.g., fever, body aches, fatigue, runny nose, cough) of COVID-19 or if they have had a recent exposure to someone with COVID-19. Anyone in your house with symptoms should be [isolated](#) and anyone with exposures should be [quarantined](#). If possible, get you and your household [tested](#) for COVID-19 in time to receive the results before having high risk individuals in your home.
- **Mask:** When at-risk individuals are visiting, *you should wear a [mask](#) while visiting with them inside your house*. In addition, you should wear a cloth face covering while in the car with them. If individuals staying with you can also wear a mask, ask them to do so as well.
- **Socially distance:** Set up your house so you can physically distance with individuals who have high-risk health conditions while they are visiting you and during meals or other times when a mask cannot be worn. If at all possible, have a separate bedroom and bathroom specifically for the long-term care resident. If weather allows, visit outdoors.
- **Wash your hands:** Make sure plenty of hand sanitizer is available and ask all those in your house to use it or to wash their hands regularly as recommended by the [CDC](#).
- **Clean surfaces:** Designate someone to regularly clean high touch surfaces in your house (e.g., tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.). Make sure you have an approved COVID-19 cleaning solution available and know the appropriate cleaning [procedures](#). Also plan for the safe storage of cleaning solutions to prevent children or those with cognitive deficits from getting into them.
- **Air flow:** Make environmental changes to decrease the indoor spread of COVID-19. This includes cracking windows, use of room HEPA filters, humidifiers and opening blinds.

## CONTACT THE FACILITY

Long-term care facilities follow strict regulations and guidelines to prevent the entry and spread of COVID-19 in their buildings. Prior to taking someone out of a long-term care facility, make sure you contact the facility administrator and understand the following:

- **Visitation status:** Many facilities are allowing both indoor and outdoor visitation and are planning for families to safely visit over the holiday. Please be aware that visitation may be restricted due to physical limitations of a given facility, weather conditions, and outbreak status in a facility or the surrounding community. Contact the facility administrator to schedule your family visitation to celebrate the holiday.
- **Outbreak status:** If a facility is currently having an outbreak of COVID-19 or currently testing individuals on suspicion of an outbreak, you should understand the risks of exposing yourself and your family to COVID-19. Exposures might affect your ability to visit with friends and family and could affect the ability of the resident to return to the facility in a timely fashion.

- Quarantining on return: The CDC currently recommends, and facilities are following these recommendations, that all individuals who leave the facility for these types of visits be placed in quarantine for 14 days when returning. If your loved one lives in a private residence or room, this means they would be separated from others in the facility for 14 days upon return. If your loved one has a roommate, this means they might not be able to return to their own room for 14 days upon return. Rather, they would be moved to an observation room, if one is available, for 14 days to make sure they do not develop symptoms of COVID-19. If an observation room is not available, your loved one may not be able to return to the facility until a room is available. ***Prior to taking your loved one out of the facility, please contact the administration to make sure that an observation room would be available on their return. If one is not available, you may be required to keep and care for your loved one until a room is available.***

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

If during the pandemic you decide you would like to care for your loved one at your home, there are resources available to help you.

- [INConnect Alliance](https://www.in.gov/fssa/inconnectalliance/) – For many personal care networks of families and friends, there are resources available for caring for a loved one at home and finding home providers in your area. To review these resources visit [INconnectAlliance.org](https://www.in.gov/fssa/inconnectalliance/) here: <https://www.in.gov/fssa/inconnectalliance/>.
- Division of Aging – For persons who meet eligibility criteria, there are a variety of home services provided by the FSSA Division of Aging that are available to help care for someone with nursing home needs at home. A list of these services and who to contact to determine if your loved one is eligible can be found [here](#).
- While several changes and limitations have been temporarily put in place because of the COVID-19 crisis, Long-Term Care Ombudsmen continue to advocate for long-term care residents. Ombudsmen help educate residents, family members, and others on residents' rights, and they support residents in exercising those rights that are guaranteed by law. Contact Indiana's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program for assistance (<https://www.in.gov/ombudsman/long-term-care-ombudsman/contact-information/>).